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ABSTRACT

A study examined the extent to which third and fourth grade classroom teachers utilized commonly recommended practices for the use of children's literature. A 39 item questionnaire was constructed and then mailed to 600 third and fourth grade classroom teachers in eight urban and suburban public school districts in Southern California and Northeastern Ohio. Two hundred nineteen teachers returned the questionnaires, for a response rate of 37%. Results showed that children's literature was being used in 37% of the classrooms surveyed. While 16 questionnaire items tended to occur regularly, 23 items tended to occur rarely. Independent silent reading tended to occur daily, whereas reading aloud to students tended to occur on a weekly basis. The majority of items that occurred regularly tended to occur on a monthly basis. (A copy of the Children's Literature Survey is attached.) (JK)

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CLASSROOM USES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A RESEARCH REPORT

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CLASSROOM USES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A RESEARCH REPORT

Although much has been written advocating the use of children's literature (Huck, 1985; Huus, 1967; Koeller, 1981; Logan, 1983), investigations of classroom practices (Hall, 1971; Morrow, 1982) found few planned experiences using children's literature. Even common practices such as an attractive display of children's books, reading aloud to children, and providing an opportunity for silent reading are less common than one would expect.

Yet the research strongly supports the use of children's literature. Becoming A Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985) identified reading aloud to children and independent silent reading as the two most significant factors contributing to the development of skillful, fluent reading. Classroom practices which result in a significant increase in independent silent reading include a classroom literature collection, well designed library corners, and regularly scheduled literature related activities (Morrow, 1985; Morrow and Weinstein, 1986).

Larrick (1958) pointed out that third and fourth grade is a particularly opportune time to encourage the use of children's literature. This is the age at which children discover their reading independence, no longer require adult assistance, and in many cases, develop insatiable appetites for books. For children in the third and fourth grades the Commission on Reading (1985) recommended a minimum of two hours per week of independent reading.

THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which third and fourth grade classroom teachers practiced common recommendations for the use of children's literature. A 39 item questionnaire (see Appendix I) was constructed by interviewing school librarians, school district reading and language arts coordinators; reviewing articles in Elementary English, Language Arts, and The Reading Teacher and textbooks such as Huck (1985) and Sebesta and Leighton (1975). The 39 items are activities that one might reasonably expect to find in classrooms emphasizing the use of children's literature.

The questionnaire was mailed to 600 third and fourth grade classroom teachers in eight urban and suburban public school districts in Southern California and Northeastern Ohio. 219 questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 37%.

Teachers were asked to rate their classroom uses of specific activities. The rating system was coded as follows: 5 indicated activities which were done daily; 4 indicated activities which were done weekly; 3 indicated activities which were done monthly; 2 indicated activities which were done once a year; 1 indicated activities which were never done.

Results for each questionnaire item were tallied and averaged over the five categories: daily, weekly, monthly, annually, never. A score of 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1 was assigned to each category (5 - daily, 1 - never). Survey items were rank ordered according to mean frequencies of occurrence. Results are shown in Appendix II.

RESULTS

Results indicated that children's literature is being used in 37% of the classrooms surveyed. 16 questionnaire items tended to occur regularly (daily, weekly, or monthly); 23 items tended to occur rarely (annually or never). Independent silent reading tended to occur daily while reading aloud to students, borrowing from the classroom library, and visiting the school or public library tended to occur on a weekly basis. The majority of items that occurred regularly tended to occur on a monthly basis: 1) read part of a book, 2) book reports, 3) read poetry, 4) class discussion, 5) research, 6) content area, 7) iillustrate favorite book, 8) teacher storytelling, 9) vary library collection, 10) book buying club, 11) new ending, and 12) art project.

Of the items that rarely occurred 15 tended to occur once a year while 8 tended to never occur. Items that tended to occur once a year were: 1) cassettes and records, 2) change arrangement of library corner, 3) provide a special place, 4) special campaigns, 5) create skits and plays, 6) bibliography, 7) feature author, 8) public library programs, 9) literature based learning centers, 10) parents'booklist, 11) bookmarks and/or bookcovers, 12) dioramas, 13) puppet shows, 14) commercials, 15) children storytelling. Items that tended to never occur were: 1) roll movies, 2) shape books, 3) readalong tapes and books, 4) class campaign, 5) magazines, 6) board games, 7) wordless books, 8) computer software.

CLASSROOM COMPOSITE

Survey results provided a composite picture of the classroom in which literature is being used. In that classroom we can expect to

find a collection of books: i.e., library books, trade books, paperbacks, bookstore books, or books used for information gathering; but no magazines. We can expect the selection of books to change on a monthly basis.

Students borrow from the classroom collection and visit the school or public library each week. They are members of a book buying club which enables them to purchase books each month. To encourage reading at home, the teacher distributes a booklist to parents once a year.

The teacher provides time each day for independent silent reading, reads aloud to the class each week; and once a month reads part of a book, poetry, and/or tells a story. Students actively respond to books by preparing a book report, participating in a class discussion, illustrating a favorite book, writing a new ending, and/or completing an art project once a month.

Once a year the teacher might change the arrangement of the library corner, provide cassettes and records, use bibliotherapy, feature a particular author, and/or set up a literature based learning center. Once a year students might participate in a special campaign and/or library program, create a skit or play; make bookmarks and/or bookcovers, and dioramas; put on a puppet show; write commercials and/or engage in storytelling.

DISCUSSION

Survey results provided information only about those 219 classrooms that represented a 37% response to the questionnaire. We can neither generalize from our sample nor do we have information about the 63% who did not respond.

Nevertheless questionnaire data tends to be biased toward more adequate rather than less adequate responses (Traverse, 1978). Consequently, we suspect that teachers who responded to the questionnaire tended to include those who emphasize the use of children's literature while teachers who did not respond tended to include those who do not emphasize the use of children's literature. If our suspicions are true, then our findings are, in fact, similar to the findings of Hall (1971) and Morrow (1982). Namely, planned experiences and common practices using children's literature tend to be less common than one would expect. Additional studies are needed to identify the extent to which classroom teachers are using children's literature.

IMPLICATIONS

It is a judgment call as to whether or not teachers are including with adequate frequency a sufficient variety of literature related activities in their classroom planning. Some survey items might be considered essential while others might seem frivolous or inappropriate. Yet given the range and diversity of interests, abilities, and learning styles that we can expect to find in our classrooms, it is necessary to offer a concommitant range and diversity of literature related activities.

Survey results and the composite classroom picture suggest that teachers who do emphasize the use of children's literature in their classrooms might be overlooking several relatively simple yet stimulating materials and activities such as: children's magazines, a class campaign, and the making of roll movies to develop main idea and

sequence. Teachers might also consider more frequent use of activities such as: puppet shows, skits and plays, writing commercials, making bookmarks and bookcovers, dioramas, storytelling by children, and featuring particular authors. In addition, as students' reading interests change and develop, teachers might wish to prepare parents' booklists several times rather than just once a year. For teachers who wish to increase the use of children's literature in their reading programs, the questionnaire used in this study might serve as a source of ideas for literature related and library corner activities.

In conclusion, while Becoming A Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985) recommended that independent reading be established as a classroom priority, Charlotte Huck (1986) reminded us that in addition to providing for independent reading, we must do something to make it memorable.

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APPENDIX I CHILDREN'S LITERATURE SURVEY

TO THE TEACHER: The purpose of this survey is to find out the scope and frequency with which teachers engage their students in activities related to children's literature. For the purposes of this study, children's literature is defined as being that body of books other than basal readers. The books may be library books, trade books, paperbacks, bookstore books, and books used for recreational or information gathering purposes.

DIRECTIONS: Please respond by placing a number from 1 to 5 in the space in order to indicate the frequency with which the activity is done in your classroom.

5 - This is done daily.
4 - This is done at least once a week.
3 - This is done once a month.
2 - This is done at least once a year.
1 - This is never done.

_____ I read part of a book to spark student interest in reading the book.

_____ I read poetry aloud to the class.

_____ I change the arrangement or decoration in the library corner so that certain books are highlighted.

_____ I vary the collection of books in the classroom library corner.

_____ I follow up the reading of a book or story with an art project.

_____ I read stories or books aloud to students.

_____ I provide a silent reading time for the reading of library books, trade books, etc.

_____ I use bibliotherapy: e.g., recommend a specific book to a student with a problem.

_____ I encourage students to borrow books to take home from our classroom library.

_____ I encourage students to visit the school and public libraries.

_____ I provide parents with booklists and suggestions for reading.

_____ I feature a particular author.

_____ I use literature-based learning centers.

_____ I have a class campaign for the best book.

_____ I incorporate fiction and non-fiction trade books with content area lessons (science, math, social science).

_____ I hold class discussions about books which students have read or heard read.

_____ I provide special places for students to read (a pillow-filled bathtub, a cardboard house, a beanbag chair, etc.).

_____ I encourage students to participate in the special programs provided by the local public library.

_____ I use computer software which focuses on children's literature.

_____ I have my class participate in special campaigns such R.I.F., M.S. Read-a-Thon, or state book award.
Please state which ones:_____

_____ I provide time for students to listen to cassettes or records of children's books.

_____ I encourage participation in a book buying club.

_____ I provide listening centers which use read-along tapes and books.

_____ I have children's magazines in the classroom.
Which ones?_____Highlights for Children, _____Cricket,
_____Jack and Jill, _____Pockets, _____Wee Wisdom,
_____Ebony Jr., _____Child Life, _____Cobblestone,
_____Electric Company, _____Humpty Dumpty,
_____Ranger Rick, _____Pennywhistle Press,
_____Sesame Street Mag., Other_____

_____ I provide board games based on a children's book or story.

_____ I require oral and/or written reports.

_____ I encourage students to create skits and plays based on children's books.

_____ I encourage students to design bookcovers and bookmarks.

_____ I have students make roll movies. (These are typically made from a cardboard carton, dowels and butcher paper.)

_____ I encourage students to create puppet shows based on a favorite story.

_____ I have students illustrate a favorite book.

_____ I provide time for students to practice storytelling.

_____ I tell stories to my class.

_____ I use wordless books with my students.

_____ I have students make dioramas based on children's books.

_____ I encourage students to use library books to research topics.

_____ I have students make shape books based on a favorite library book.

_____ I have students write commercials to advertise a favorite book.

Please list any other activities you use to promote children's literature in your classroom.

APPENDIX II RANK ORDER OF MEAN FREQUENCIES OF SURVEY ITEMS

DAILY:	Silent reading	4.5
WEEKLY:	Read aloud	4.3
	Borrow from classroom library	3.8
	Visit the library	3.6
MONTHLY:	Read part of a book	3.4
	Book reports	3.2
	Read poetry	3.2
	Class discussions	3.0
	Research	3.0
	Content Areas	2.8
	Illustrate favorite book	2.7
	Teacher storytelling	2.7
	Vary library collection	2.6
	Book buying club	2.6
	New ending	2.5
	Art project	2.5
ANNUALLY:	Cassettes & Records	2.4
	Change arrangement of library corner	2.4
	Provide a special place	2.2
	Special campaigns	2.1
	Create skits and plays	2.0
	Bibliotherapy	2.0
	Feature author	2.0
	Public library programs	2.0
	Learning center	1.9
	Parents' booklist	1.9
	Bookmarks and bookcovers	1.8
	Dioramas	1.7
	Puppet shows	1.7
	Commercials	1.6
	Children storytelling	1.6
NEVER:	Roll movies	1.4
	Shape books	1.4
	Read along tapes and books	1.4
	Class campaign	1.4
	Magazines	1.4
	Board games	1.3
	Wordless books	1.3
	Computer software	1.2